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A CAHNERS/R.R. BOWKER PUBLICATION THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS MAGAZINE OF BOOK PUBLISHING MAY 31, 1991 $2.50

#2220 ****** 5-DIGIT 20814
#LNGLESS20J069141# 0646
PW SAMPLE 6 XB
JEANNE LONG
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Publishers Weekly

VOLUME 238 NUMBER 24 *THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS MAGAZINE OF BOOK PUBLISHING* MAY 31, 1991

ISSN 0000-0019

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Checking Out Children's Books

A survey of public and school librarians provides a detailed portrait of book selection and purchase trends

School and public libraries buy more than half of the children's books sold in the U.S. every year. In these recessionary times, many library budgets are in danger of being cut (sometimes drastically); therefore, a survey of librarians across the country comes at a critical point. Preliminary results from this survey, conducted in May by Cahners Research, confirm some long-held perceptions, while others may surprise.

• **The average annual budget for purchase of children's books is $19,555 for public libraries, $5573 for school libraries.** The average number of students served by the school libraries surveyed is 747, which gives an average dollars-per-student figure of $7.46.

• **Libraries devote an average of 2100 square feet to children's and young adult books** (2257 sq. ft. in public libraries, 1896 sq. ft. in school libraries). 21.1% of libraries (24.7% PL, 18.4% SL) have increased their space for children's and YA books over the last two years.

• **The great majority of children's books stocked in libraries are hardcovers:** 85.9% (85.7% PL, 86.4% SL); 14.1% are paperbacks (14.3% PL, 13.6% SL). Of those paperbacks, 63.6% are mass market titles (68.9% PL, 56.9% SL) and 36.4% trade paper (31.1% PL, 43.1% SL).

• **Public libraries carry a higher percentage of fiction than school libraries.** For public libraries, fiction represents 58.8% of stock, vs. 41.2% nonfiction; it is just the opposite in school libraries, where nonfiction predominates: 58.6% of stock, vs. 41.4% fiction.

• **Paperbacks are the format of choice for teenagers.** 82.4% of public librarians say teenagers prefer paperbacks, as do 50.6% of school librarians. When asked how hardcover YA books circulate, the majority of public librarians replied only "fair," while the largest percentage of school librarians replied "good." Adult books comprise 16.5% of the books in public libraries' YA sections, and 18.6% of the books in school libraries' YA sections.

• **The great majority of children's books are bought through wholesalers.** 81.7% of children's titles are purchased through wholesalers (79.2% PL, 84.3% SL); 15.2% are purchased through publishers (16.3% PL, 14% SL); 3.1% are obtained in other ways (including donations and bookstore purchases). The wholesalers most commonly purchased from are: Baker & Taylor, Follett, Bound to Stay Bound, Ingram and Brodart.

• **Fewer than half (45.1%) of the librarians surveyed need reviews in journals to justify acquisitions** (42.4% PL, 48.3% SL), while 53.7% do need them (55.3% PL, 51.7% SL). For those who need reviews, the average number of reviews needed is 1.63 (1.66 PL, 1.62 SL). Of public librar-

When Librarians Usually Purchase New Children's Books

	Public Libraries	School Libraries
Prepublication	16.5%	2.3%
Upon publication	42.4	12.6
3 months after publication	18.8	17.2
6 months after publication	12.9	18.4
More than 6 months after publication	4.7	34.5

Factors That Determine When Libraries Purchase New Books

	Public Libraries	School Libraries
Budget	28.2%	42.5%
Reviews	29.4	31.0
Collection needs	21.2	21.8
Patron requests	15.3	13.8
Annual spending timetable	2.4	13.8
Teacher requests	1.2	12.6

Tables provided by Cahners Research.

ians, 41.7% need one review, 25% need two reviews, and 13.9% need three; of school librarians, 33.3% need one review, 45.2% need two and 2.4% need three.

• **90.9% of librarians do not have to see the actual book before purchasing it** (87.1% PL, 95.4% SL).

• **After selecting the books for purchases, most librarians do not need to have their choices approved.** Only 17.1% of librarians need approval (14.1% PL, 20.7% SL) and 82.9% do not (85.9% PL, 79.3% SL). Of public librarians who need approval, 41.7% need approval by a book selection committee, and 33.3% need approval by the library's director. Of school librarians who need their choices approved, 61.1% need them approved by the principal, and 16.7% by a book selection committee.

• **Libraries frequently buy trade bindings.** Trade bindings are purchased "always" by 9.1% of libraries (5.9% PL, 12.6% SL); "often" by 29.1% (30.6% PL, 27.6% SL); "occasionally" by 50.9% (49.4% PL, 54% SL); and "never" by only 5.1% (4.7% PL, 5.7% SL).

• **Librarians find publishers' catalogues generally useful, but think they could be more useful.** 16% in total call them "very useful" (15.3% PL, 16.1% SL); 35.4% call them "useful" (31.8% PL, 40.2% SL); 35.4% call them "somewhat useful" (38.8% PL, 32.2% SL); and 11.4% call them "not useful" (14.1% PL, 9.2% SL). The most common suggestions to publishers: provide review sources, improve indexing and show more book covers.

• **Posters and bookmarks are the two most popular promotional items in libraries.** 73.1% of the libraries surveyed use publishers' promotional items (64.7% PL, 82.8% SL). 93.8% of those use posters (89.1% PL, 97.2% SL), 83.6% use bookmarks (89.1% PL, 79.2% SL), 49.2% use mobiles (49.1% PL, 48.6% SL), and 40.6% use publishers' displays (34.5% PL, 44.4% SL).

• **More than two-thirds of the libraries surveyed stock audiotapes.** 68.6% of the libraries carry audiotapes for children (88.2% PL, 50.6% SL). Public libraries carry an average of 200 titles, school libraries an average of 153. Of the audiotapes carried, 73.6% are spoken-word (71.2% PL, 78.6% SL) and 26.4% are music (28.8% PL, 21.4% SL). The average annual budget for audiotapes is $1273.40 for public libraries and $312.40 for schools.

• **Children's magazines are carried by most libraries.** 82.3% of the libraries surveyed carry them (94.1% PL, 72.4% SL). Public libraries stock an average of 14, school libraries an average of 18. —D.R.

Importance of Various Criteria in Terms of Their Influence on Library Purchasing Decisions

(Scale of 1 to 6: 1 - not important; 6 - extremely important)

Reviews in journals	5.6
Starred reviews in journals	5.5
Patron requests	5.0
Reading copies	3.9
Quote ads in journals	3.5
Publishers' catalogs	3.5
Internal review publications	3.4
Wholesalers' catalogs	3.2
Visits from sales reps	2.7
Direct mail	2.5
Author appearances	2.5
Telemarketing	1.9

Categories of Children's Books Carried in Libraries

•**Activity books** are carried by 45.7% of libraries (56.5% PL, 34.5% SL), with an average of 15.4 titles stocked (10.9 PL, 19.3 SL).

•**Advanced readers** are carried by 61.1% of libraries (74.1% PL, 48.3% SL), with an average of 79.9 titles stocked (96.0 PL, 66.9 SL).

•**Beginning readers** are carried by 70.3% of libraries (92.9% PL, 48.3% SL), with an average of 74.7 titles stocked (91.3 PL, 51.5 SL).

•**Biographies** are carried by 90.3% of libraries (92.9% PL, 87.4% SL), with an average of 74.8 titles stocked (84.7 PL, 69.1 SL).

•**Board books** are carried by 42.3% of libraries (74.1% PL, 11.5 SL), with an average of 28.4 titles stocked (30.4 PL, 3.0 SL).

•**Books on problems** are carried by 77.7% of libraries (87.1% PL, 69.0% SL), with an average of 52.6 titles stocked (77.1 PL, 26.7 SL).

•**Folk and fairy tales** are carried by 86.3% of libraries (91.8% PL, 80.5% SL), with an average of 43.5 titles stocked (58.5 PL, 31.9 SL).

•**Middle grade books** are carried by 78.3% of libraries (88.2% PL, 69.0% SL), with an average of 248.5 titles stocked (250.1 PL, 258.1 SL).

•**Picture books** are carried by 74.9% of libraries (92.9% PL, 57.5 SL), with an average of 274.4 titles stocked (363.8 PL, 176.1 SL).

•**Pop-up books** are carried by 26.9% of libraries (40.0% PL, 13.8% SL), with an average of 34.7 titles stocked (43.7 PL, 4.8 SL).

•**Young adult fiction** is carried by 74.3% of libraries (89.4% PL, 59.8% SL), with an average of 193.5 titles stocked (143.4 PL, 254.8 SL).

•**Young adult nonfiction** is carried by 60.0% of libraries (67.1% PL, 52.9% SL), with an average of 342.0 titles stocked (115.0 PL, 537.7 SL).

POSITIONS OPEN

PUBLICATIONS Manager for New England Booksellers Association. This position will require excellent writing skills, strong communications skills and word processing ability (preferably Macintosh). The Publications Manager oversees the production of the bi-monthly NEBA Newsletter, the Holiday Catalog and all other Association print projects. As an integral part of the small NEBA Team, the Publications Manager will head up advertising sales, help with the Annual Trade Show, workshops and promotion and publicity. Salary--mid-twenties with benefits. Please send a letter and résumé to: Sharon Kirby, New England Booksellers Association, 45 Newbury St., #506, Boston, MA 02116.

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and appearing
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Publishers Weekly (ISSN 0000-0019) RPUSA 123397457 is published weekly with the exception of the last week in December and with additional issues in January, February and August. Second Class postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **Publishers Weekly**, P.O. Box 1979, Marion, OH 43302. All editorial and advertising correspondence should be addressed to the office of publication: *Publishers Weekly*, 249 West 17th St., New York, NY 10011; telephone: 212/645-0067; telex: 12-7703; fax: 212/645-5409. Address circulation correspondence and changes of address to *Publishers Weekly*, P.O. Box 1979, Marion, OH 43302; telephone 1-800-842-1669; in Canada and all other countries, telephone: 1-614-382-3322. Printed in USA. SUBSCRIPTION PRICES: U.S.A.: 1 year $119, 2 years $199, 3 years $279. Canada: 1 year $177, 2 years $301, 3 years $425. Air delivery to all other countries: 1 year $260, 2 years $442, 3 years $624. (Remit in U.S. funds only.) *Publishers Weekly* is published by Cahners Publishing Co., a Division of Reed Publishing USA, 275 Washington St., Newton MA 02158-1630. Terrence M. McDermott, President; Frank Sibley, Executive Vice President; Robert T. Brown, Sr. Vice President/General Manager; Jerry D. Neth, Sr. Vice President/Publishing Operations; J. J. Walsh, Sr. Vice President/Finance; Thomas J. Dellamaria, Sr. Vice President/Production & Manufacturing; Ralph Knupp, Vice President/Human Resources. Bowker Magazine Group is also an affiliate of R. R. Bowker Co., Bob Krakoff, Chairman of the Board; Ira Siegel, President. *Publishers Weekly*™ is a registered trademark of Reed Properties Inc., used under license. Chairman; Ronald G. Segel, Chairman and CEO; Robert L. Krakoff, President and COO; William M. Platt, Sr. Vice President. Cahners Publishing Company, a Division of Reed Publishing USA ☐ Specialized Business Magazines for Building & Construction, Research, Technology, Electronics, Computing, Printing, Publishing, Health Care, Foodservice, Packaging, Environmental Engineering, Manufacturing, Entertainment, Home Furnishings, and Interior Design. ☐ Specialized Consumer Magazines for Child Care, Boating, and Wedding Planning.